DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 219 SO 024 454

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TITLE	Address by Jacques Delors, Chairman of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, General Conference of UNESCO (27th, Paris, France, November 2, 1993).
INSTITUTION	International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (UNESCO), Paris (France).
REPORT NO	EDC/X/3
PUB DATE	Nov 93
NOTE	8p.; For related papers, see SO 024 394-407 and SO 024 448-453.
AVAILABLE FROM	Secretariat, UNESCO, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France; fax: 014-306-4678; phone: 014-568-4876.
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Decision Making; Economic Development; *Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Futures (of Society); Higher Education; *International Cooperation; *International Education; International Educational Exchange; Moral Values; *Role of Education; Science and Society; Social Change; *World Problems

ABSTRACT

In this speech to the members of the general conference of UNESCO, the chairman of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century describes the progress of the Commission's work. The chairman discusses education and the challenges of the world as it enters the 21st century. Changes mentioned include the rapid pace of population growth in the number of countries, technological progress, as well as the expansion and refinement of communications. These phenomena of global scope and a host of other related factors have given rise to a complex, dynamic set of problems whose implications and constraints have, in many cases, reached crisis proportions: the economic crisis of underdevelopment, the economic crisis of unemployment in some of the developed countries, the obsolescence of certain growth models, a crisis in the very ideology of progress, and, perhaps most important, a moral crisis in value systems having to contend with changed circumstances and different forms of individual behavior. The speaker identifies four crucial issues facing education: (1) the capacity of education systems to become the key factor in development in the economic, scientific, and cultural spheres; (2) the ability of education systems to adapt to new trends in society by preparing for change despite growing insecurity; (3) the relations between the education system and the state; and (4) the promulgation of the values of openness to others and mutual understanding or the values of peace. (DK)

ED 404 219

EDC/X/3
November 1993

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Commission internationale sur l'éducation pour le vingt et unième siècle

International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century

Address by Mr. Jacques Delors
Chairman of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century

on the occasion of the twenty-seventh session of the General Conference of UNESCO

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France

2 November 1993

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Mr. President,
Mr. Director-General,
Distinguished Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am here to report to you on progress of work in the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, a Commission which you decided to establish.

We have embarked on our work at a time of formidable changes in the world, which we sense may prove to be either a boon or, alternatively, a disaster. Whereas advances in knowledge, especially in science and technology, bring hope of progress for humankind in the future, events each day remind us just how likely the contemporary world is to stray off course, and how exposed it is to dangers that are in some cases acute, and how vulnerable to conflicts. The increasingly evident interdependence of peoples and nations, which is the hallmark of our time, is providing scope for unprecedented international co-operation; but the emergence of this truly global consciousness also reveals how great are the disparities besetting our world, how complex and intricately linked its problems and how varied the threats that are liable at any time to jeopardize what has been achieved so far. And so, as we approach the end of the twentieth century, our future seems both full of promise and fraught with anxiety, as though poised in a delicate balance between two extremes. The great question that we are asking, now more than ever before, is how humankind may gain some control over its history so as to direct, if only in part, the course of events.

It is perhaps in this question that we must seek the cause of the growing interest in education that is apparent in all countries and all sectors of society - an interest in education *per se* but also, increasingly, in its relations with other spheres of activity.

Education has, of course, always been perceived as a vital function of society, which perpetuates itself by handing down from one generation to the next what people have learnt about themselves. But the idea is gaining ground that education is one of the most powerful tools with which to shape the future - or, more modestly, to steer us into the future, taking advantage of prevailing trends and trying to avoid the dangers. Indeed, is it not education that can, as we say today, 'make a difference' by helping individuals and societies to rise to the challenges of the contemporary world?

Education and the challenges of the world today

It was these challenges, their scale and their urgency, that the Member States of UNESCO and its Director-General had in mind when they decided to set up the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first century. A whole series of changes is profoundly altering the complexion of the world as we know it today and affecting its development. To mention only the main ones, which have often been analyzed in this forum, I shall refer first of all to the rapid pace of population growth in a number of countries; such growth is undeniably a factor conducive to development, as was the case in Europe in the nineteenth century, but it can also plunge whole regions into deepening poverty. Another important factor, technological progress, reaching out across the globe, is still basically a victory by humankind over the scarcity of resources and perhaps the only hope of survival for the billions of this planet's inhabitants; but that progress is the cause of a wide range of problems - affecting the environment and employment, for example - and is also a source of confrontations and rivalries between

countries and groups: those that derive benefit from it and those that are denied such benefits. As regards the spectacular expansion and refinement of communications, the third important parameter that I wanted to mention, they do bring individuals and peoples closer together within the 'global village', but if one is not careful, they also tend to trivialize culture, and to have a levelling effect on cultural diversity, by transmitting the ideologies and languages of the technologically dominant countries.

These phenomena of global scope and a host of other related factors have given rise to a complex, dynamic set of problems whose implications and constraints have in many cases, if the analysts are to be believed, reached 'crisis' proportions - the economic crisis of underdevelopment, the economic crisis of unemployment in some of the developed countries, the obsolescence of certain growth models, a crisis in the very ideology of progress (as may be seen in intellectual debate), and finally - and perhaps most importantly - a moral crisis in value systems having to contend with changed circumstances and different forms of individual behaviour. The disparities, or more simply the conflicting demands, that are characteristic of our time are reflected in a series of 'dichotomies' - between the North and the countries of the South, between the diversity and the globality of the world, between cultural identity (which to some means a sense of belonging) and universality between the appeal of modernism and the hankering after tradition and - no doubt the most troublesome conflict of all in terms of civilization - between personal independence and the solidarity that we ought to show towards others. All these tensions are indicative of the paradoxes and strains besetting our world. And this process and the chain reaction set up are unfolding at an ever-quickening pace, creating that sense of vertigo one finds at the end of a millennium, even if this is sometimes more imaginary than real.

Education is clearly part and parcel of this great upheaval; without it, the changes would be impossible, and it in turn is affected by their repercussions, even though, as I was saying, its role is to be the driving force of change. Education, hampered by inadequate funds and quantitatively and qualitatively inappropriate systems, and slow to adjust, is confronted with a huge task, the scale of which can be gauged by even a cursory look at contemporary problems. It is expected to respond worldwide to the growing demand for education and, at the same time, to guarantee a high standard of teaching, and also equity, as required by the right of everyone to education; to prepare for and foster change by stimulating a spirit of inquiry, an ability to adjust and a willingness to innovate in every woman and every man; and to ensure both the progress of modern societies and the fulfilment of individuals rooted in their culture. So the agenda is an ambitious one.

The work of the International Commission

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The terms of reference of the International Commission that you have set up require it to reflect on all these challenges facing education in the coming years and to formulate suggestions and recommendations in the form of a report which - and here I quote its mandate - 'can serve as an agenda for renewal and action for policy-makers and officials at the highest levels'. This also gives an idea of the scope of the task assigned to the Commission! Naturally, neither I nor my colleagues have any intention of outlining some kind of ideal educational model capable of warding off all disasters. Our approach is intended to be realistic and directed more towards analyzing the problems than dictating standards.

Aware as it is of the diversity of cultures and the specific nature of different problems and experiences, aware as it is of the diversity of the political and social objectives of UNESCO's Member States, the International Commission proposes to identify and focus on the factors conducive to the progress of individuals and groups inherent in national education systems. It is the impetus necessary for endogenous development, based on education, with the ultimate purpose of improving not only living standards and conditions but also the quality of life, for our contemporaries and as a legacy for future generations.

In carrying out this task, the Commission has the benefit, on the one hand, of working wholly independently and, on the other, of having access, from the privileged vantage point of the UNESCO world community, to a wealth of international information, experience and studies covering several decades but reflecting, besides, the present-day concerns of the Organization's Member States. Anxious as it is to be receptive to the world in all its diversity, the International Commission is preparing to hold meetings in all the regions of the world and to establish working groups on special topics, involving experts from various countries and eminent persons - researchers and decision-makers - representing as broad a spectrum of cultural environments and occupational sectors as possible. Lastly, to make sure that the wide-ranging debate on education which your Director-General would like to see and which is central to the Commission's concerns is set in train - I hope through this report - we shall have to take a long and comprehensive view and constantly update and correct our thinking through contact with the real circumstances and aspirations of the countries themselves.

Finally, as the President of the World Commission on Culture and Development said in his recent address to your assembly, the close links between culture and education cannot be over-emphasized, and we, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar and myself, shall continue to see to it that all relations necessary for the smooth functioning of our work are maintained between the two Commissions.

Four crucial issues

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the present stage in our inquiry, we feel that there are four crucial issues, and I should like to outline them briefly here.

The first is the capacity of education systems to become the key factor in development. This means that education has to perform a threefold function - in the economic, scientific and cultural spheres. Everyone expects education to help build up a qualified and creative workforce that can adapt to new technologies and take part in the 'revolution of intelligence' that is the driving force of our economies. Everyone also - in North and South alike - expects education to advance knowledge so as to ensure that economic development goes hand in hand with responsible management of the physical and human environment. And, finally, education would be failing in its task if it did not produce citizens rooted in their own cultures and yet open to other cultures and committed to the progress of society.

The second crucial issue, we believe, is the ability of education systems to adapt to new trends in society. This brings us to one of the fundamental dilemmas of education - having to prepare for change despite the growing insecurity that haunts and destabilizes us. The fact is, as I was saying, that our societies are in the throes of change. Whether

it is a matter of individual or social values, family structure, the role of women, the status accorded to minorities, or the problems of urban development or the environment, education has to take account of a whole range of interrelated and interreacting factors that are always in a state of flux.

The third crucial issue, to our minds, is that of the relations between the education system and the State. The roles and responsibilities of the State, the devolution of some of its powers to federal or local authorities, the balance to be struck between public and private education - these are just some aspects of a problem which, moreover, differs from one country to another.

The fourth and final crucial issue is the promulgation of the values of openness to others, and mutual understanding - in a word, the values of peace. This is a point constantly emphasized by the Director-General of UNESCO. To borrow a passage from a statement that he made in Stockholm in January 1993, in which he also spoke of UNESCO's appointed task, 'Teaching to care, learning to care and share are part and parcel of the need to join in the effort to promote a new humanism as we approach the next century'. We fully endorse this approach. We must also take account of different traditions, cultures and degrees of development. Any message that claims to be universal - one of education's lofty ambitions - must be conveyed with all the subtle qualifications that take full account of human beings' infinite variety. This is no doubt our major difficulty. It explains the Commission's concern to reach out to the heart of every continent, to listen, and to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the communities that make our world such a rich and varied place.

Education for the twenty-first century

Following on from this, and to conclude this concise overview, I should like, briefly, to make a few general remarks.

First of all, what exactly will this future-oriented study of education consist of? As will now be clear to everyone, what the Commission proposes to do is not to construct 'scenarios for the future' resulting in a whole set of precepts intended for educational policy-makers. What we should like, more modestly, is to be able to provide a few pointers that would help them, within the economic, social and cultural context of their countries, to look to the future, allowing themselves the greatest possible freedom of choice compatible with all the multifarious constraints that affect the fate of human beings, whether individually or collectively. And through its analyses and debates, the Commission would like to be able to give each and every one of us, in our private lives and as citizens, a new outlook on education and the will to persevere for as long as possible in our endeavour to achieve self-fulfilment through study.

As you will be aware, therefore, the Commission has no intention of issuing instructions, but seeks to help countries to find their way and choose a course based on understanding of all the relevant issues and facts. For those in charge, this means, among other things, never losing sight of the possible long-term effects of measures whose immediate advantages are obvious, or of the possibility of some unforeseen interaction between a decision and other apparently unrelated factors.

Have the Commission's initial deliberations already given some indication of the course to be embarked upon by education for the twenty-first century? It is too early to say. Nonetheless, I think it can be said, as indeed the report by Edgar Faure did, that it

will be a course towards lifelong education, since initial education alone can no longer provide the qualifications a person will need throughout life. It will also be education through a give-and-take process, with each individual being alternately, at different times in her or his life, a learner and an educator within a working society.

With regard to the formal education system - although we shall also speak about non-formal systems - the crucial role of teachers in the educational process means restoring their full moral authority, for teachers do indeed have a mission, in the strong sense of the term. What this entails is consolidating the authority and prestige of the school, but without lapsing into authoritarianism; for in all the areas to be addressed by the Commission, the participation of all concerned is clearly a condition for the success of the reforms and their relevance to the circumstances of each country. For this reason, teachers' representatives will be associated with our work.

Another clearly perceived requirement for all countries, especially developing countries, is to ensure the training of the intellectual and scientific élites that are crucial to their development. The effort to stem the 'brain-drain' in the countries of the South is only one aspect of the battle to raise standards, a task rendered particularly arduous by the need for the goal of excellence to be combined with that of equality of access to education.

Finally, a growing number of observers consider the diversification of all components of the education system - educational establishments, teachers, responsibilities, formal systems and non-formal systems, to be a modern society's best safeguard against the shortcomings of one or other aspect of its political and social system seen as a whole. Here again, we find this vitally important concept of a working society mobilized in its entirety for the task of providing education throughout life.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the beginning of my statement, I pointed out that the interdependence of nations today provided scope for - and required - international co-operation on a new scale and in all fields. The establishment of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first century is one of the ways of asserting the will to achieve this as the turn of the century draws near. Rest assured that, with the help of all your countries and that of UNESCO, we shall seize that opportunity.

Thank you.

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